

EMPLOYEES WELLNESS PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT: - Worksite wellness programs are important interventions to protect and promote employee health. They help reduce direct and indirect health care costs, absenteeism, and presenteeism; avoid illness or injury; and improve the quality of work life and morale. This Tool introduces key concepts and strategic tips for planning workplace-based wellness programs rather than individual health promotion events, while highlighting organizational change and development theories central to introducing and implementing effective proactive worksite wellness programs. Burnout and Compassion fatigue are topics which are covered in the literature and academic programs. Wellness in order to combat these is also an important topic for helping professionals. This study examined employee wellness programs and their effect on mental health workers' compassion fatigue and burnout. A mixed-methods model used the Professional Quality of Life survey and five open-ended questions relating to the wellness activities. Many barriers and incentives to use of the wellness programs were found and scores were compared with other demographic and programmatic information. Further research should continue to examine mental health workers, specifically, and the impact of environmental support.

KEYWORDS: worksite wellness programs, benefits, best practices, participation.

INTRODUCTION

Beyond a doubt, this is an exciting time for employee wellness programs (EWPs). Almost daily, new information is publicized indicating that these programs are being adopted by a growing number of employers seeking ways to hold down their health care costs and improve the productivity of their workforce. Once the exclusive domain of very large employers, wellness programs are increasingly showing up among mid-size and even smaller employers. At their best, the programs are also becoming increasingly sophisticated, and credible evidence about their effectiveness is quickly accumulating.

Attention to EWPs was heightened by numerous wellness and prevention provisions included in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which have great potential to expand the reach and effectiveness of worksite wellness programs. The U.S. National Physical Activity Action Plan has also recently offered a number

of recommendations for how business can promote physical activity interventions within the workplace. Rising demand from employers for state-of-the-art wellness programs that produce meaningful results, combined with new opportunities to advance wellness research and support implementation of proven programs, make this both a necessary and opportune time to strengthen the evidence about EWPs.

Toward that end, the National Institute for Health Care Management (NIHCM) Foundation brought together nearly 40 national experts in May 2010 to develop an agenda to guide the future research needed to encourage and assist employers and other program adopters to implement evidence-based wellness programs.

HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis for this study is that employees who utilize wellness activities initiated from within their agency of employment will report lower levels of compassion fatigue and burnout than their counterparts who do not take part. Most companies provide referral and independent access to an outside Employee Assistance Program as well as insurance benefits which offer incentives for attending a gym or fitness facility. Outside agencies which provide support for employees will not be focus of this study, however they may be available for the respondents surveyed. The research question guiding this study is: what is the impact of Employee Wellness Programs on mental health workers' reported symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout.

GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

Through our research, we evaluate whether wellness and prevention programs are effective, assess their ROI, and develop recommendations supporting interventions for lifestyle modifications and health improvement. Methods we typically use in evaluations of health and wellness programs include

- The aggregation and analysis of health risk assessment (HRA), biometric, medical insurance claims, absence, disability, workers' compensation, and productivity data.
- The application of quasi experimental research designs to compare program participants with nonparticipants over time and across several health, productivity, and financial outcome measures.

- The use of multivariate statistics and other econometric methods to control for confounding variables and reduce self-selection bias.
- Reporting the impacts of workplace health and productivity management programs on behavior change, risk reduction, and cost savings. Because we are recognized thought leaders in the field of Health and Productivity Research, the methodologies and results of many of our client engagements are published in peer-reviewed journals and presented at industry conferences.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

To improve the significance of worksite wellness programs, the usefulness of relevant studies cannot be over emphasized. Easy access to studies that promote health programs help to promote participation in the programs and increase knowledge on the need to participate in wellness program. Wellness programs, when shaped from the results and recommendations of studies like this, improve the efficient use of human capital by increasing the number of employees being present and punctual to work in optimal health. This study could result in policy recommendations that make wellness programs more efficient by allowing them to invest in higher yield programs for maximum benefits. This may lower health care costs or slow the increase of them by providing important benefits.

HEALTHY PEOPLE=BETTER BUSINESS

Here are the facts: Healthier people work harder, are happier, help others and are more efficient. Unhealthy workers are generally sluggish, overtired and unhappy, as the work is a symptom of their way of life.

Of course, not all companies are as lucrative or as large as Google, and perhaps resources are not as vast, but every company has the ability to place some type of wellness program in place. As healthcare costs continue to rise, and there is more demand to work around the clock, this is more important than ever.

BACKGROUND ON WELLNESS PROGRAMS

Employers of all sizes utilize various types of health management solutions. These include wellness programs designed to promote health and prevent disease, as well as disease management interventions, which are designed to manage patients with chronic conditions. Among larger employers, about four-fifths use case management, disease management, nurse advice lines, and health assessments with about one-half offering employees financial incentives for participation.

Smaller firms also employ health management solutions, although they are less likely than larger employers to do

so. In addition to their employees, employers may also include spouses in these offerings. Wellness programs usually include health-risk assessments (HRAs) and biometric screenings. An HRA is a questionnaire that individuals can complete to evaluate their health risks and quality of life. It collects data on health status and behavior, as well as medical history details, including those of the individual's family.

It is common practice for employers to contract with third parties to administer the HRA in order to receive de-identified results on the employees in return. The information collected is used to provide custom feedback to participants about their current health risks, and an action plan for addressing them. Biometric screening programs collect information on physical characteristics of the individual such as height, weight, body mass index, blood pressure, cholesterol, and glucose level. The screening is used to identify individuals at high risk for chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure (hypertension), and heart disease. Since participation is voluntary, employers sometimes offer financial incentives, which can be provided in a number of different ways.

WELLNESS IN 4 STEPS

So how do you install a wellness program that's efficient, smart, scalable and goal-oriented? We have a four-step process to create this type of culture change — and the steps are simple enough for you to start taking right away, too:

1. Determine the needs of employer AND employee. First, we ask a simple question: What do employees need, and how do those needs fit with the goals of the employer? It's impossible to answer these questions without assessing both sides. It is essential to understand the mindsets, challenges, and your audience first before laying out a framework for its path. This includes surveying not only the employees, but also the employer. A simple health risk assessment (which your insurance carrier may offer) followed by biometric screens is a good way to assess problem areas.
2. Analyze the data and create a plan. Based on our survey data, we try to determine what elements will work for the existing culture. Is it fitness classes that will motivate the employees, wellness workshops, individual health assessments, or some combination of the above? We always recommend combining wellness education with physical activity — otherwise, many employees will not take advantage of classes and programs they need to see real benefits.
3. Create a communication plan. A culture of wellness doesn't happen without reinforcement. Employers must create a communication plan that lays out the

program's framework and different methods (and times) to communicate the information to employees. This keeps wellness at the forefront.

4. Put an incentive plan in place. We have found, time and again, that rewarding employees for getting healthy and achieving results encourages the type of change needed to get a program off the ground and encourage a real shift in employee culture. However, because the required behavior changes are new, challenging, and difficult to sustain, programs must include incentives and rewards throughout the year in order to drive long-term engagement.

It takes time to break old habits and develop new ones; companies, like people, cannot approach wellness as a short-term or quick-fix solution. But getting started is easier than you think.

CONCLUSIONS

From this study, and the existing literature, it is clear that there are a lot of benefits (anticipated and unanticipated) of worksite wellness programs. This research showed that as anticipated, companies benefit most from reduced absenteeism, increased productivity, reduced health related expenses, and enhanced recruitment of healthy employees and, more surprisingly, from having happier healthier workers, an improved culture at the worksite to support health, and a decreased rate of injury. Employees also yield advantages, some of which were predictable, including increased job satisfaction, improved health outcomes, reduced health care utilization, improved employee relations and morale, and reduced disability; there were other less noted benefits including changes in individual behavior, improved knowledge on making healthy food choices, improved culture at the worksite to support health, a high level of

participation in the program, and increased knowledge on the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.

At the current rate of increase, the cost of health care to employers will likely be the single most significant detriment to profitability and viability over the next decade. Annual increases of 8-14% in direct costs, in addition to the even more notable indirect costs, cannot continue without catastrophic outcomes. While significant, this is only a small part of the overall ROI provided by an effective employee wellness program, which will also positively impact a number of other bottom line variables. Forward-thinking companies across the country have already implemented successful wellness programs, with notable results. Decreased sick time, enhanced engagement or "presenteeism," lowered disability and overall health care costs, as well as improved recruitment and retention have all been clearly demonstrated on both a case by case and broader organizational basis.

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